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ABSTRACT

Writers attempting to describe administration have approached the subject from a number of perspectives. Researchers such as Gulick (1937) identified planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting as functional elements of administration. Hemphill, Griffiths, and Fredericksen (1962), using simulated job settings, discovered eight primary factors in administrative behavior: exchanging information, discussing with others before acting, complying with suggestions, analyzing the situation, maintaining organizational relationships, organizing work, responding to outsiders, and directing the work of others. Two recent research reports used a field study and observations to analyze actual on-the-job behavior of superintendents and principals. Duignan (1980) found that the superintendent's activities are not generally planned and organized but rather are made up of uninvited verbal encounters, externally imposed deadlines, and crises. Willis found that the principal's work is marked by uncertainty, and is hectic in pace, varied in composition, and discontinuous. These findings provide comfort to the school administrator who feels guilty for spending time accomplishing little more than coping with ambiguity, frustration, and disruption. Increased used of field techniques such as ethnography and observation would be of value in uncovering further clues about the behavior of school administrators. (Author/JM)

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What do school administrators do on the job? The reports of two recent attempts to answer this question have prompted the author to trace the progression from early attempts to describe administrative behaviour through to a "sleuthing" approach to the problem. An increased use of field techniques is recommended to advance research in this area. (Ed.)

THE ENIGMA OF ADMINISTRATIVE BEHAVIOUR

Merv. Batchler

EA 014 444

INTRODUCTION

How much do we know about what school administrators do on the job? The preambles to two recent research reports suggest that we know very little:

> What do school administrators do when discharging their administrative responsibilities? How do they spend their days? Their weeks? Their years? ... Despite decades of research in educational administration we are unable to answer these deceptively simple but fundamental questions. (Duignan, 1980, p.6)

And again:

> Despite the focal position of school principals in Australian education, there exist hardly any data on the work that they actually do. (Willis, 1980, p.26)

And we all thought that they spent their time calmly "POSDCORB-ing"!

ATTEMPTS TO DESCRIBE ADMINISTRATIVE BEHAVIOUR

Writers attempting to describe administration and/or administrative behaviour have approached the problem of description from a number of perspectives.

In one of the earliest attempts to describe administrative behaviour, Fayol (1949) claimed that the essential elements of managing were planning, organizing, coordinating, controlling and commanding. Gulick (1937), in analysing the work of a chief executive in terms of its various functional elements, coined the now familiar word "POSDCORB," the letters of which were the initial letters of the words planning, organizing, staffing, directing coordinating, reporting and budgeting, which together comprise a taxonomy of administrative functions or processes.

Various other writers have attempted to identify essential elements of administration. The table prepared by Miklos (1968) summarizes components of the administrative process identified by several writers. (Table 1)

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TABLE 1

Components of the Administrative Process
identified by Various Writers

Components of Process	Writer						
	Favol	Gulick	Newman	Sears	AASA	Litchfield	Gregg
Planning	x	x	x	x	x		x
Organizing	x	x	x	x			x
Coordinating	x	x		x	x		x
Controlling	x		x	x		x	
Commanding	x						
Staffing		x					
Directing		x	x	x			
Reporting		x	x				
Budgeting		x					
Assembling Resources			x				
Allocating					x		
Stimulating					x		
Evaluating					x	x	x
Decision-making						x	x
Communicating						x	x
Programming						x	
Influencing							x

From E. Miklos. "The Administrative Process," paper presented at the Alberta Principals' Leadership Course, 1968.

Focussing primarily upon the behaviour of individual actors, Getzels (1958) has described administration as a social process in which behaviour is a function of both institutional role expectations and the personality of the role incumbent defined by his need-dispositions.

Hemphill (1958) outlined administrative leadership within a framework of group problem-solving, and out of this developed a theory of administration based on problem solving. Simon (1957) considered decision making to be the central function of administration and viewed organizational behaviour as "a complex network of decisional processes", claiming that "administrative processes are decisional processes". Griffiths (1959) also highlighted the importance of decision making, claiming that it is:

> not only central in the sense that it is more important than other functions, as some writers have indicated, but it is central in that all other functions of administration can best be interpreted in terms of the decision-making process. (p. 121-122).

THE DIMENSIONS OF ADMINISTRATIVE BEHAVIOUR

In a study by Hemphill, Griffiths and Fredericksen (1962), which had as its prime objective:

> To determine dimensions of performance in the elementary school principalship and thus to develop a better understanding of the nature of the job of the school administrator (p.91),

the researchers used a battery of four in-basket tests - three school in-baskets and the Bureau of Business In-Basket. The school in-baskets were the Jefferson in-basket materials developed by the researchers for use in this study. The Bureau of Business In-Basket had been developed independently in connection with research conducted by Educational Testing Service. The sample consisted of 232 elementary school principals from thirty-two school districts in the United States.

Responses were scored for content - what was done - as well as style - how it was done. Sixty-eight scoring categories were used. Forty category scores selected for analysis were intercorrelated and the resulting matrix factor analysed. Eight first order factors were obtained. The correlations among these factors were also factor analysed and two second order factors entitled "Preparation for Decision" and "Amount of Work" were found. The ten factors were interpreted by the researchers as "basic concepts of administrative performance in the in-basket test situations". (p.147)

The first order factors were listed as:

Factor A Exchanging Information
Factor B Discussing with Others Before Acting
Factor C Complying with Suggestions Made by Others
Factor D Analyzing the Situation
Factor E Maintaining Organizational Relationships
Factor F Organizing Work
Factor G Responding to Outsiders
Factor H Directing the Work of Others

It was suggested that these primary factors constituted a set of categories comprising a taxonomy of administrative behaviour.

Fredericksen (1972) reported details of a study which he had conducted using the Bureau of Business In-Basket with the purpose of learning something about the major dimensions of administrative behaviour occurring in the simulated job.

The in-basket test was administered to 335 people including sub-groups of undergraduate students enrolled in a course in industrial psychology, graduate students in business administration, government administrators, business executives and army officers.

Similar scoring categories and scoring procedures to those used in the school administration study were employed. As a result of the analysis of the data, eight primary factors and three second order factors were identified.

Fredericksen suggested that administrative behaviour as revealed by the data analysis of in-basket scores could be described in terms of the dimensions Preparing for Action, Amount of Work and Seeking Guidance (the second order factors), and that it could be described in greater detail in terms of the eight primary factors as follows:

Acting in Compliance with Suggestions
Preparing for Action by Becoming Informed
Concern with public Relations
Procrastinating
Concern with Superiors
Informality
Directing Subordinates
Discussing

There is a marked similarity between the factors obtained in the study of the administrative behaviour of school principals Hemphill, Griffiths and Fredericksen (1962) and those identified by Fredericksen, Jensen and Beaton (1972).

What these studies really reflect is the attempt to try and discover the dimensions of administrative behaviour, using simulated job settings. Although much research of administrative behaviour in the past has proceeded along these lines, there are clearly problems associated with this approach, particularly their failure to consider the complex social milieu in which principals operate daily.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH

In their attempts to answer the question "what do school administrators do?" the authors of the two research reports mentioned at the beginning of this paper have adopted a different approach in trying to explain administrative behaviour of school administrators.

In the first study Duignan (1980) used a field study approach to:

> observe, describe and analyse the actual on-the-job behavior of the superintendent of schools so as to develop a composite view of the nature of his administrative behaviour. (p.6)

He concluded, in part, that:

> The observational data on the eight superintendents tend to indicate that the superintendent's administrative behaviour is not, generally, as planned and organized as is sometimes suggested in the literature. He works in a world of action where uninvited verbal encounters and externally imposed deadlines play havoc with his attempts to bring order to his work behaviour. Instead of the calm and controlled practitioner who diagnoses problems and potential problems, generates alternatives and then chooses the optimum solution, one sees a more frustrated individual who is faced with an array of problems and crises of varied composition. Confronted with the myriad tasks and responsibilities of his job, the superintendent rarely finds sufficient time to analyze his problems and plan his strategies. (p.25)

In the second study, after "continuous observations" of three Melbourne principals for three weeks each, Willis (1980) found that:

> Prominent among the characteristics of the principals' work described have been Mintzberg's gestalt of variety, brevity and fragmentation in work activity. The school principal does not enjoy the luxury of undisturbed time to deal with and complete the tasks that face him or her. It is a conclusion of this study and others in the literature that the principal's work is marked by uncertainty. Despite any effort to plan the day ahead and the presence of "clock-determined" events, such as scheduled weekly meetings at lunchtime on Mondays, the principal faces the uncertainty that (1) such scheduled events may have to be postponed or cancelled because of the appearance of new factors demanding attention, and (2) there is usually little, if any, indication of what may happen next as the day proceeds. Thus the principal's day will generally be hectic in pace, varied in its composition, discontinuous in any pursuit of tasks, with the unexpected always one of the few certainties of the job. For survival, the principal must cope with such an array of ambiguity, frustration and disruption. (p.46)

CONCLUSION

What this paper has briefly done is trace a progression from "what is administrative behaviour?" to "what is it that school administrators do?" - a move from the global to the specific, from our management literature heritage to a narrower focus upon educational administration. So also we might trace a concomitant change in methods of inquiry from armchair theorizing and prescriptions based on personal experience through to a "sleuthing" approach - a tracking of the prey in its own environment.

Knowing what it is that school administrators do has obvious implications for those engaged in the preparation of such personnel as well as for those aspiring to be administrators. Recent findings might also provide some comfort to the school administrator, who, familiar with the literature which identified components of the administrative process, experiences guilt feelings because he hadn't "POSDCORB-ed" all day, but rather spent his time coping with "an array of ambiguity, frustration and disruption. (Willis, 1980, p.46)

For a variety of reasons an increased use of field techniques such as ethnography, naturalistic description, and observational studies would seem to be of value in uncovering further clues about the behaviour of administrators in schools and school systems.

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